

Message Text

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ACTION ARA-14

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 DHA-02 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01
INR-07 L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02
SS-15 USIA-06 MC-02 AID-05 IGA-02 PC-01 EB-07
COME-00 MCT-01 /081 W
-----005754 210451Z /20

R 202056Z JUL 77
FM AMEMBASSY SAN SALVADOR
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4956
INFO AMEMBASSY GUATEMALA
AMEMBASSY MANAGUA
AMEMBASSY SAN JOSE
AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

C O N F I D E N T I A L SAN SALVADOR 3396

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, PINT, ES
SUBJECT: ASSASSINATION OF 87-YEAR OLD FORMER PRESIDENT COLONEL
OSMIN AGUIRRE Y SALINAS

REF: SAN SALVADOR 3376

1. SUMMARY. FORMER PRESIDENT OSMIN AGUIRRE Y SALINAS
WAS KILLED ON JULY 12TH BY UNKNOWN ASSAILANTS.I
RUMORS AROUND AS TO THE MOTIVE FOR THE ATTACK ON A FOR-

GOTTEN, SICK AND VERY OLD MAN, BUT IT IS PROBABLE THAT
THE FPL IS RESPONSIBLE. END SUMMARY.

2. ON JULY 12 THREE MEN APPROACHED THE SAN SALVADOR
HOME OF COL. OSMIN AGUIRRE Y SALINAS AND SHOT AND
WOUNDED HIM AS HE STOOD NEAR THE ENTRANCE. HE
DIED EN ROUTE TO THE MILITARY HOSPITAL. AGUIRRE Y
SALINAS SERVED AS PROVISIONAL PRESIDENT OF EL SALVADOR
AFTER THE OUSTER OF GENERAL MAXIMILIANO MARTINEZ
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IN 1945. HE ROSE TO THAT POSITION AFTER THE
FIRST POST-MARTINEZ PRESIDENT WAS UNSEATED IN A
NEW REVOLT, AND REMAINED AS PRESIDENT FOR FOUR
MONTHS. HE CAME TO THE JOB AFTER HAVING SERVED AS

DIRECTOR OF THE NATIONAL POLICE. AGUIRRE Y
SALINAS IS REMEMBERED BY MANY AS AN OBDURATE MAN

WHO WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR MANY KILLINGS IN HIS PUTTING DOWN OF ISOLATED UPRISINGS DURING THAT ERA. ALTHOUGH MEMORIES ARE LONG IN THIS SMALL COUNTRY, THE EMBASSY DOUBTS THAT HIS KILLING WAS ONE OF PERSONAL REVENGE.

3. THREE MAIN EXPLANATIONS FOR THE KILLING ARE CURRENT: (A) THE FPL, FUERZAS POPULARES DE LIBERACION FARABUNDO MARTI, HAVE CLAIMED RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE SHOOTING THROUGH A COMMUNIQUE SENT TO LOCAL PAPERS, SAYING THEY HAD DONE AWAY WITH ONE OF THE PEOPLE'S WORST ENEMIES. (B) A SECOND THEORY IS THAT THE GOVERNMENT WAS RESPONSIBLE FOR THE KILLING, CREDITING THE FPL TO THROW OFF THE SCENT. THE GOES MOTIVE IS SAID TO BE IN PREPARATION FOR A POSSIBLE KILLING OF A JESUIT PRIEST BY OR NEAR THE JULY 20 DEADLINE OF THE 30-DAY THREAT AGAINST THE NATION'S JESUITS; THE NEXT PRIEST DEATH CAN THEN BE CONSTRUED AS A REVENGE KILLING. (C) A THIRD THEORY IS THAT AN OLD ENEMY FROM THE MID-FORTIES TOOK ADVANTAGE OF THE PRESENT POLITICAL ATMOSPHERE TO DO AWAY WITH AGUIRRE Y SALINAS, CLAIMING THE FPL DID THE DEED.

4. COMMENT. THE MOST LIKELY OF THE THREE PREVALENT RUMORS IS THAT THE FPL DID, IN FACT, CONFIDENTIAL

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KILL THE AILING AND AGED EX-PRESIDENT. THE FPL'S MOTIVATION COULD HAVE BEEN TO WARN THE REGIME THAT NO ONE WOULD BE EXEMPT FROM THEIR VENGEANCE OR POSSIBLY TO PROVOKE USG COUNTERACTION AGAINST THE JESUITS RESULTING IN FURTHER DETERIORATION OF GOVERNMENT'S POSITION. DISCUSSION WITH A HIGH-LEVEL GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL INDICATES THAT THE LEADERSHIP TAKES THE AGUIRRE SLAYING VERY SERIOUSLY. IT IS INTERPRETED AS AN FPL WARNING TO THE REGIME THAT NO GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL, MILITARY OR CIVILIAN, WHATEVER HIS RANK, AGE, OR CONDITION, IS SAFE. AS REPORTED REFTEL, THIS SOURCE STATED THAT GOVERNMENT HAD HESITATED TO MAKE STRONG STATEMENT ON AGUIRRE SLAYING OR UGB THREAT FOR FEAR OF PROVOKING FURTHER TERRORIST ACTIONS.

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Disposition Approved on Date:
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